



The Myth Of Potential

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Here's the thing – we all have potential, maybe some more than others, but we all have it. Potential is easy to recognize, but not so easy to realize. Most of us intrinsically recognize the gift of potential, but many simply choose to do nothing about it, and sadly, it's the rare few who will maximize their potential. The problem with potential is society has deemed it to be a fungible commodity. People in today's world trade on potential as if it were performance – it's not.

Most people are fed a steady diet of potential from the moment they're born. Parents, teachers, coaches, and eventually employers all contribute to the problem by overrating potential as a certain predictor of future performance. Potential affords no surety of outcome; it merely offers hope. While hope can clearly serve as an inspiration, it can also quite easily become a delusion. Leaders would be well advised to place less stock in potential and focus their attention on effort and outcome. We must stop **looking for leaders** and recognize the leadership skills of those who exhibit more than just potential. Good leaders don't promote people hoping they'll perform – they promote people after they perform.

Ability and aptitude are only gifts if understood and used. The cold hard truth is you're not special because of your potential, you're special because of your dogged **pursuit** of your potential, and you're even more special when you achieve your potential. Don't tell others how gifted you are, provide them with tangible evidence you know how to use your giftedness – show them.

The world is awash with potential. We don't need more potential. We should not be starved for potential leaders, but we should be very, very hungry for real leaders. Leaders should recognize and acknowledge the unique potential in everyone, but avoid actions which create rewards based solely on the existence of potential. Smart leaders are much more interested in high character, high achievement, high engagement, and high performance than high potential. ***Reward performance not potential.***

Where people get confused is potential has little to do with success. In fact, many studies have been done which show little correlation between potential and actual attained success. What the studies do show is a high correlation between work ethic, performance and success. Realizing potential takes focus, determination, and dedication – it takes work. In my experience working with some of the world's most talented CEOs, it was/is their drive not their potential which had the greatest impact on their success. Potential absent drive will simply go to waste.

Potential is unrealized attainment – nothing more and nothing less. The key to converting potential into attainment is commitment. So my questions are these: are you committed? Are you committed to put in the energy and effort necessary to realize your potential, or will you squander your potential? It's much easier to talk about your potential than it is to realize it, but then again, outstanding achievement has never been easy.

Thoughts?